Are You a Satisfied Customer at Aeon? A Case Study in Malaysia

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Due to many global marketers and global brands, retailers face many challenges. With increased competition in the retailing industry, customers typically have more retail options to choose from. As a result, retailers seek efficient ways to fulfill and meet their consumers' needs and demands. This paper aims to investigate if service quality, perceived trust, perceived convenience, and product price significantly correlate with customer satisfaction. This paper also examines if customer satisfaction leads to behavioral intention. A total of 150 Aeon customers participated in an online survey via Google Forms. This data was analyzed using SPSS. This finding revealed that service perceived quality. trust. perceived convenience, and product price have a significant relationship with customer satisfaction. The researchers also found that customer satisfaction is strongly associated with behavioral intention. The findings show that the necessity of service quality, trust, convenience, and product price were good predictors of customer satisfaction, which in turn may lead to behavioral intention. The findings provide new insights on customer satisfaction towards Aeon Malaysia.

Keywords: Aeon, Customer Satisfaction, Service Quality, Retail Industry, Malaysia

JEL Classification: M00, L80, L84

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a fast-growing country in terms of hypermarkets. Since 1993, Marko has been the first to operate this hypermarket type (Lee, 2004). The long-term profitability of the hypermarket company is achieved by offering outstanding customer service. Hypermarkets operate in a highly competitive market environment where competitors are fully aware of one another's positions (Codrington, 2002). Malaysian hypermarkets have exploded in popularity over the last three decades (Heng, Yeong, Siong, Shi, & Kuan, 2011). Malaysian consumers are attracted to prominent export retailers through various retail outlets of varying sizes (Abu & Roslin, 2008). Past research has shown that customer satisfaction is linked with organizational success (Suvanmanee et al., 2020), brand loyalty (Kee et al., 2021), and brand image (Pandey et al., 2021). Thus, customer satisfaction serves as feedback for a successful retail marketing strategy in a competitive market and provides customers with value for money. Therefore, this paper intends to identify the key factors that lead to customer satisfaction and make Aeon more competitive in the market. This paper extends the research by Yo et al. (2021), who studied customer satisfaction towards Shoppe in Malaysia. This paper proposes that four key factors, namely service quality, product price, perceived trust, and perceived convenience, can predict customer satisfaction. The researchers added two new variables namely service quality and product price. The researchers argued that these two variables are more critical factors leading to customer satisfaction. Additionally, this article brings up the point that consumer satisfaction reflects behavioral intention.

Nowadays, modern hypermarkets and traditional outlets coexist successfully in Malaysia, with no evidence of customer discrimination (Abu & Roslin, 2008). In 1984, Aeon established a presence in Malaysia with the name Jaya Jusco Stores Sdn. Bhd. Due to the rising competition across the retail businesses, companies have switched their attention away from traditional marketing methods and toward relational exchange activities with consumers, resulting in longer-term corporate gains. As a result, companies' performance and efficiency have grown increasingly dependent on focusing on service quality. It is vital to remember that to attain customer satisfaction, customers prefer to assess their purchasing experiences in terms of the perceived value that arises from the amount of money spent to obtain a product or service and the advantages obtained in return. As a result, high-quality service has a significant impact on consumer satisfaction and purchase behavior (Bapat & Thanigan, 2016). Therefore, understanding what defines customer happiness has become critical to maintaining customer connections and preserving organizational performance (Afzali & Ahmed, 2016).

Customer satisfaction and service quality are the two most important aspects of a company's marketing strategy. Maintaining global competitiveness in highly competitive sectors requires offering exceptional customer service that results in satisfied customers (Shemwell, Yavas, & Bilgin, 1998). As a result, perceived service quality is a widely contested and researched topic in marketing theory, as indicated by the widespread academic interest (Asubonteng, McCleary, & Swan, 1996). Similarly, securing economic success motivates the pursuit of consumer satisfaction. Thus, customer satisfaction is viewed as a necessary condition for achieving the satisfaction of customers and loyalty, as well as financial objectives such as return on investment, profitability, and market share (Scheuing et al., 1993). Within an organization, views of service quality can arise at multiple levels, including the core service, the physical environment, and interactions with service providers (Bitner & Hubert, 1994). Furthermore, a customer's overall satisfaction with an organization's services is dependent upon (or a consequence of) the customer's encounters or experiences with the company. Customer satisfaction, like service quality, exists at various levels inside an organization, including satisfaction with

the contact person, satisfaction with the service provided, and satisfaction with the organization.

The literature shows that perceived trust, behavioral intention, convenience, product pricing, and service quality positively affect consumer satisfaction. The purpose of this study is to determine the moderating effect of perceived trust, behavioral intention, perceived convenience, and product pricing on service quality and customer satisfaction. Later, the role of perceived trust, behavioral intention, perceived convenience, and product pricing intention, perceived convenience, and product pricing on service quality and customer satisfaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction can be described in various contexts related to goods and services. Customer satisfaction refers to a customer's feelings or attitudes regarding a product or service after utilizing it. High levels of customer satisfaction have an impact on the profitability of any company. Most people value firms that treat them the way they want to be treated; in fact, they will pay extra for this service. A lack of consumer satisfaction, on the other hand, has a far more significant utilizing impact on the bottom line. A high level of consumer satisfaction ensures long-term consumers and distinguishes you from the competitors. It also allows you to prevent the negative effects of a poor customer experience, such as customer turnover and unfavorable word of mouth (Szyndlar, 2021). Therefore, knowing buyer satisfaction should be valued in the company. Fundamental questions include: What products or services do we offer? Who are our target customers? What do the customers desire and want to buy? What are the actions needed to take to improve the process? By answering these questions, you will have a greater understanding of your customers continuously, and your products and services will be better suited to market demands (Rampersad, 2001).

Service quality

Services are increasingly becoming a larger component of many firms' regional, national, and global income, and they are considered as an earnings tool. Today, the quality of service is key to an organization's success in building a competitive edge and increasing competitive strength. Yeh and Li (2009) defined service quality as "consistent compliance with customer expectations and comprehension of customer expectations from a specific service." According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1985), the service quality is established by assessing what the client feels should be offered to him with what is really supplied to him. In retail service, it is vital to consider quality from the point of both services and commodities (Mattsson, 1992). Moreover, the client's quality service related to obtaining service is not simply quantified and understood conceptually. Because consumer tastes and expectations for a product are constantly changing, product quality must also be modified or adjusted. Scholars generally believe that quality is linked to the value of a product offering, which can result in either pleasure or discontent on the side of the individual. If everyone wants the present client is to be kept, the company must create a positive image of service guality to attract new customers and improve the level of service offered. To gain a competitive edge, the company also must consistently enhance its service quality, and customer happiness will assist the company raises its sales through service quality (Ogiemwonyi et al., 2020). Given that service quality is about customer expectation towards service performance, the researchers hypothesize a significant link between service quality and customer satisfaction.

H1: Service quality is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Perceived trust

Without trust, all social connections would collapse or function irregularly. Perceived trust can be defined as thoughts, sentiments, emotions, or behaviors displayed when consumers believe a supplier can be depended on to operate in their best interests when they relinquish direct control (Patrick, 2002). Trust has been a driving factor in buyer-seller interactions for a long time, with purchasers having long-standing high expectations of business relationship fulfillment (Lin, Wang, Wang, & Lu, 2013). Furthermore, trust is defined as a circumstance in which one of the parties participating in the exchange process is convinced of the dependability and integrity of the other party. Consumer confidence is essentially the total of the consumer's knowledge and conclusions about items, qualities, and advantages (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Trust may promote good views about social commerce in terms of satisfaction, which can then affect the desire to engage in purchasing behavior (Lăzăroiu, Negurita, Grecu, Grecu, & Mitran, 2020). It can be concluded that perceived trust is a reliable predictor of customer satisfaction. With this, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Perceived trust is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Perceived convenience

Perceived convenience in a service economy defined service convenience as customers' perceptions of time and effort associated with purchasing or utilizing a service (Berry, Seiders, & Grewal, 2002a). The decision, access, search, transaction, and after-sales convenience are four components of shopping convenience that have an impact on consumer retention and loyalty in the retail context (Moeller, Fassnacht, & Ettinger, 2009). The greater the level of convenience felt by consumers, the higher the level of customer happiness in retailers. Customers' pleasure with an online purchasing business will have a beneficial influence on their behavioral intention. Furthermore, possession is the most powerful feature of perceived convenience (Surianggo, Amelia, & Ronald, 2021). Research is also stated to have numerous components, including selection convenience. To improve customer satisfaction and perception of service quality, a service provider might focus on delivering service convenience to its customers (Berry et al., 2002b). Therefore, the researchers hypothesize:

H3: Perceived convenience is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Product price

Price is what is given up or sacrificed to obtain a product or service from the customer's point of view (Zeithaml, 1988b). According to Bei and Chiao (2001), the price is defined as "what is given up or sacrificed to acquire a service or product", whereas Kumavat (2012) stated that the price refers to the amount of money paid for the product or service, as well as the total of the values that customers trade for the benefits of owning or utilizing a product or service. Price appropriateness may enhance customer happiness after obtaining the target level of customer benefits, encouraging customers to continue to trust and make repeat purchases (Friani, Igir, & Tampi, 2018). Buyers always seek low costs so that they can buy a lot of items with the money they have. The seller, on the other hand, desires a high price to make a significant profit. The distinction is what can lead to pricing negotiations (Prasilowati, Suyanto, Safitri, & Wardani, 2021). Consumers will pay attention to the prices paid by other customers, and no one wants to spend more money than other customers. Price is a crucial element in customer satisfaction because a consumer carefully considers receiving the best value for his money from the product. The fairness of the pricing will impact customers' perceptions, and eventually, their willingness to become customers. With this, it is hypothesized that: H4: Product price is positively related to customer satisfaction.

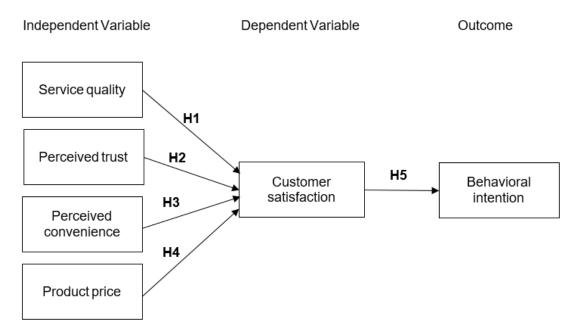
Behavioral intention

Behavioral intention is defined as the probability to act and the direct determinant of action influences many human activities (Schifter & Ajzen, 1985). A person is more likely to engage in each behavior if he or she intends or wants to do so (Ali, Raza, Puah, & Karim, 2017). Behavioral intentions are markers of whether customers will continue to use or discontinue from using a certain product or service (Zeithaml,1988a). Favorable behavioral intentions are related to a service provider's capacity to persuade its clients to speak good things about them. Service quality has an impact on experience values, relationship quality, and purchase intent (Tran, 2020). Furthermore, the journey from consumer value to satisfaction was discovered to be substantial. Customer satisfaction and behavioral intents such as willingness to return and share positive word-of-mouth are also important (Ryu & Han, 2009). As a result, the researchers employ a behavioral intention context to study the impact of consumer happiness and experience on purchasing behavior. The researchers hypothesize that the higher the level of satisfaction, the higher the consumer's intentions to purchase. As such, the following hypothesis is developed:

H5: Customer satisfaction is positively related to behavioral intention

This study aims to examine the relationship between service quality, perceived trust, perceived convenience, product price, and customer satisfaction. In addition, this study proposes that behavioral intention is the outcome of customer satisfaction. Figure 1 presents the research model used by the researchers.

Figure 1. The Research Model



RESEARCH METHOD

The respondents for this study came from various backgrounds and had personal experience with AEON in Malaysia. The sample size of this survey was 150 Aeon customers in Malaysia. The data was collected using a Google Form survey.

Measures

A survey questionnaire was used to measure respondents' customer satisfaction using a five-point Likert scale where "1" indicates strongly disagree to "5" that indicates strongly agree.

Demographic-personal data

The researchers used single-statement items to determine the demographics of the respondents, including gender, age, ethnicity, annual income, highest education level, and occupation.

Service Quality

The researchers developed a four-item scale to assess service quality towards AEON. In general, service quality refers to a customer's expectations versus a company's performance. A company with high service quality is likely to be able to meet customer needs while remaining economically competitive. The items are based on respondents' experience with AEON and its customer service.

Perceived Trust

The researchers created a four-item scale to assess perceived trust towards AEON. Perceived trust is the degree to which a person has faith in another person or organization to carry out their duties without taking advantage. The scale items were created based on the comfortability of AEON customers purchasing at AEON. The number of purchases customers have made is AEON their first choice for purchases and if the customers trust AEON.

Perceived Convenience

The researchers developed a four-item scale to assess perceived convenience towards AEON. When a product or service saves a user time, it is considered convenient. A product or service is considered convenient when it reduces a user's cognitive, emotional, and physical burdens. The scale items were created based on the availability of the products at AEON online or in a mall, can AEON fulfill customer's needs, are AEON stores at nearby locations where customers live, and do AEON bring convenience to customers.

Product price

The researchers created a three-item scale to identify if the product prices at AEON are reasonable. Price refers to the cost of the product or service. Pricing depends on competition, demand, production costs, and consumer willingness to pay (Twin, 2021). The scale items were created based on the price of the products, products quality and return, and exchange policy.

Customer Satisfaction

The researchers created a three-item scale to identify customer satisfaction towards AEON. Customer satisfaction is a measure of a consumer's overall experience, which includes their overall pleasure and satisfaction with the product and services. The scale items were created based on the quality of the product at AEON, satisfaction with the staff at AEON, and the recommendation of AEON to other people.

Behavioral Intention

The researchers developed an eleven-item scale to assess the consumer behavior factors towards the customers of AEON. The scale items were based on perceived trust, behavioral intentions, and perceived convenience. Consumers demonstrate consumer behavior when they purchase, search, evaluate, and dispose of products and services that meet their needs (Schiffman, Hansen & Kanuk, 2007).

RESULTS

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	53	35.3
Female	97	64.7
Age		
20 and below	71	47.3
21-30	56	37.3
31-40	12	8
41-50	4	2.7
Above 50	7	4.7
Ethnicity		
Malay	83	55.3
Chinese	41	27.3
Indian	21	14
Eurasian	2	1.3
Iban	3	2
Monthly Income		
Below RM1,000	96	64
RM1,000-RM3,000	31	20.7
RM3,001-RM5000	10	6.7
RM5,001-RM10,000	8	5.3
Above RM10,000	5	3.3
Highest Education Level		0.0
High school or equivalent	23	15.3
Diploma	29	19.3
Bachelor's Degree	90	60
Master's Degree	4	2.7
Ph.D.Degree	4	2.7
Occupation	4	2.1
Student	101	67.3
Private Sector	28	18.7
Government Sector	20 12	
		8
Unemployed	7	4.7
Retired	1	0.7
Self-employed	1	0.7
Are you an AEON member?	400	05.0
Yes	128	85.3
No	22	14.7
How often do you go to AEON?	_	
Almost every day	5	3.3
Few times a week	12	8
Once a week	26	17.3
Once or twice a month	89	59.3
Once a quarter or less	18	12

Table 1. Summary of Respondent's Demography (N=150)

Table 1 summarizes the respondents' profiles. The majority of the respondents are females (64.7%) within the age of 20 years and below. They are most likely the students, which consist of (67.3%) who are currently taking bachelor's degrees (60%). Besides, the monthly household income for 64% of the respondents is below RM1000. There are only 14.7% of the respondent are not registered as AEON members, while the majority

of the respondents are a member of AEON (85.3%). Most of the respondents did not go to AEON frequently, whereas they go to AEON once or twice a week, which is 59.3%.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
6					
Service Quality	0.886				
Perceived Trust	0.719**	0.826			
Perceived Convenience	0.654**	0.809**	0.844		
Product Price	0.710**	0.795**	0.767**	0.813	
Customer Satisfaction	0.759**	0.812**	0.780**	0.809**	0.822
Behavioral Intention	0.616**	0.791**	0.749**	0.714**	0.717**
0.808					
Μ	16.07	15.99	15.99	11.86	12.34
11.49					
SD	3.138	2.896	2.932	2.306	2.195
2.441					
Number of Items	4	4	4	3	3
3					

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Coefficients Alpha, and Zero-order

 Correlations of All Study Variables

Note: N=150; *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. Diagonal entries indicate Cronbach's coefficient

Table 2 shows the factors' means, standard deviation, correlations, and Cronbach alpha. The relationship between variables was tested by using Pearson product-moment correlation. Reliability is a tool for assessing the validity of a questionnaire, which is also considered a variable indicator. The factors that influence customer satisfaction and behavioral intention towards AEON in Malaysia comprise service quality, perceived trust, perceived convenience, and product price. The researchers tested this hypothesis using regression analysis. As in Figure 2, service quality, perceived trust, behavioral intentions, perceived convenience, and product price are the independent variables applied in the research, while customer satisfaction is the dependent variable that is affected by those independent variables. Behavioral intention represents the outcome of customer satisfaction. The coefficient's alpha of the four independent variables falls between 0.80 and 0.88, which are higher than 0.70 indicating that the internal consistency reliability of all variables is relatively high. The lowest value of the Person correlation coefficient among all the variables is 0.616, while the highest is 0.809, which are both greater than 0. This illustrates that there is a positive association between two variables, where the increase of the value on one variable will also increase the value for another variable.

Variables	Customer Satisfaction	Behavioral Intention
Service Quality	0.248***	
Perceived Trust	0.229**	
Perceived Convenience	0.188*	
Product Price	0.273***	
Customer Satisfaction		0.717***
R ²	0.77	0.51
F Value	121.86	156.16
Durbin-Watson Statistic	1.96	1.79

Note: * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p <0.001.

Table 3 shows the standardized coefficients beta value between the independent variable and the dependent variable as a result of multiple regression analysis. Customer satisfaction among the respondents towards AEON is influenced by the aspects of service quality, perceived trust, perceived convenience, and product price with the standardized coefficients beta value of 0.248, 0.229, 0.188, and 0.273 respectively and the beta value for customer satisfaction and behavioral intention is 0.717. Customer satisfaction has the strongest effect on behavioral intention due to the highest absolute value of the standardized beta coefficient.

The first R-squared value, which is customer satisfaction as the dependent variable while service quality, perceived trust, perceived convenience, and product price as independent variables are 0.77 or 77%. Besides, the R-squared value for which behavioral intention is a dependent variable and customer satisfaction as an independent variable is 0.51 or 51%. By comparing these two R-squared values, 0.77 of the R-squared value will have the model which fits the data better. The F value for customer satisfaction is 121.86 while for the behavioral intention is 156.16. The value for the Durbin-Watson statistic for customer satisfaction and behavioral intention are 1.96 and 1.79. Both values stay between 0 and smaller than 2, which shows that there is a positive autocorrelation in the sample. For example, the higher the service quality, the higher the customer satisfaction, or a decrease in customer satisfaction towards AEON will lead to a decrease in behavioral intention.

Figure 2. Hypothesized Model

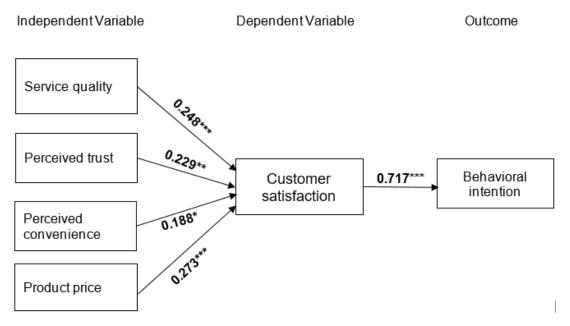


Figure 2 shows how all the factors are interconnected to each other, which are the dependent and independent variables. Service quality, perceived trust, perceived convenience & product price are independent variables and customer satisfaction is the dependent variable. The behavioral intention of the customer is the outcome of customer satisfaction. The results of value for all the analyses are significant, which shows that H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 are accepted. The behavioral intention is 0.248, 0.229, 0.188, 0.273, and 0.717 respectively indicating that independent variables and dependent variables have a positive relationship.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the perceived ease of use and convenience of AEON online shopping platforms significantly impact customer satisfaction. Consumers' desire for convenience has grown as they devote less time to shopping and more to other interests. In addition, the ability to transact orders when dealing with online shopping also contributes to the perceived convenience. Online commerce does not have spatial and time barriers. Therefore, customers can shop anytime and anywhere. As it is necessary for the products to be delivered to consumers by hand, delivery plays a vital role in e-commerce. The product delivery service is the most significant component in increasing customers satisfaction. Most customers like to acquire products that will be delivered within a specific time frame and in good conditions as per the product descriptions. The availability of informative and easy-to-understand product descriptions utilizing various presentation components, such as text, images, and videos, can impact perceived convenience to the customers. Customers may receive a good impression of items, zoom and rotate them, and demonstrate how they match their needs using these tools.

In this study, the most dominant perceived factor that influences customer satisfaction is perceived ease of use. The growing popularity of mobile services has presented a new challenge for service providers to develop more practical yet user-friendly, context-aware, and tailored mobile services. This study reveals that perceived usefulness and perceived trust do not influence customers' satisfaction towards online shopping on Shopee. As indicated by the low beta values of 0.248, 0.229, 0.188, and 0.273 respectively and the beta value for customer satisfaction and behavioral intention is 0.717, perceived usefulness and perceived trust to customers' satisfaction with AEON in Malaysia is minimal.

Consumers are more inclined to buy from online retailers who emphasize time savings and faster task completion. While trust was found to have a positive relationship with customer satisfaction, the relationship between trust and satisfaction varies significantly from different studies.

CONCLUSION

Customer retention is critical for businesses to go beyond satisfying both existing and new customers. The method has proven to be a critical tool for improving the firm's performance, particularly in non-financial areas. As a result, the practice should become a critical management tool for retailers seeking to remain competitive in the retailing sector. The study's findings, as well as the implications provided, are expected to enlighten customer retention practices in the Malaysian retailing sector.

In conclusion, the researchers discovered that perceived ease of use and convenience are the most important determinants of customer satisfaction with Aeon products and services. Furthermore, according to the data analysis, customer satisfaction with Aeon is very high. According to this finding, most respondents are Aeon loyal customers who have been shopping there for more than a year and are unlikely to switch to a competing supermarket. Most of them are eager to recommend Aeon to family and friends and to make another purchase from Aeon in the future. Customer satisfaction must be maintained and improved because it is easier and more cost-effective to retain existing customers than to attract new customers. It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide valuable insights and guidance to managers for them to understand organizational behavior better and thus improve customer satisfaction.

This study provides significant insights into consumer behavior during a global pandemic. Despite this, there are some limitations to the study. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the questionnaire was conducted online through Google Forms. It was challenging to increase the number of responses because many participants were not interested in taking part in an online survey. For this reason, it is recommended that the study include another variable, such as customer loyalty, for future research considerations.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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